**Oppositions: Light and Dark**

Throughout the play Shakespeare uses imagery to create light and darkness. As a playwright during the Elizabethan times Shakespeare relied heavily on the use of language to portray his ideas of light and dark. Although light is generally connotated with good events and darkness connotated with bad events, Shakespeare oftentimes writes so that both light and darkness are associated with both good and bad. This makes his interpretation of the opposition between light and dark unique.

Shakespeare portrays the conventional ideas that light is connotated with good, and dark with bad and evil. This is evident in the way that he associates Juliet’s beauty to the sun and always uses light imagery to convey ideas of beauty, while using dark imagery to convey ugliness. In Act 1 Scene 5, Romeo sees Juliet for the first time, and is stunned by her beauty. He contrasts light and dark and emphasizes the duality in order to convey that Juliet’s beauty is far greater than those around her. “It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night/ As a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear,” (1.5.52-3) Romeo sees Juliet as the only light and beauty, in a room full of ugly people. Shakespeare uses this rather racist imagery to talk of Juliet’s surpassing beauty; he compares her to a light jewel and he compares the other people to a dark Ethiopian person’s ear. Another way that Shakespeare reinforces the conventional ideas of light and dark, is the way that he connotates the night with death and fear. In Act 4 Scene 1, Juliet intertwines death with darkness while expressing her fears of waking alone in the vault. “Or, if I live it is not very like/ The horrible conceit of death and night,” (4.3.38) Also in the graveyard scene, where Romeo and Paris both venture to pay respects to Juliet, Paris’s page expresses fear of standing alone in the dark graveyard. The setting of a dark graveyard is associated with fear and evil, and the combination of these elements of the setting frightens the poor page.

However, Shakepeare doesn’t only adhere to the conventional ideas of light and dark. He portrays the night as a haven for Romeo and Juliet where they can be in private, away from the disapproving eyes of society. Juliet displays her yearning for the night when she says, “Spread thy close curtain, love- performing night/ That runaways’ eyes may wink, and Romeo/ Leap to these arms, untalked of and unseen.” (3.2.5-7) In this entire speech at the beginning of Act 3 Scene 2, Juliet awaits the night and conveys her impatience for the night to come. The idea that night is a secluded and cherished time is further conveyed when the two lovers have a discussion over whether it is the lark or the nightingale that sings after their wedding night. These two birds represent light and dark; the lark represents the daytime and the nightingale represents the night. Both lovers wish that the bird that sings is the nightingale because the lightness of the day signals their goodbyes and forces them apart. Romeo reinforces the idea that light forces the lovers apart when he says, “More light and light, more dark and dark our woes.” (3.5.36)

Shakespeare conveys multiple ideas using light and darkness. His unique interpretation of the opposition between light and dark conveys that both light and dark can be both good and bad. This is a part of Shakespeare’s ideas that oppositions overlap closely and are part of a very fragile balance. The balance between two oppositions can be easily swayed. As the Friar says in Act 2 Scene 3, good can easily become bad and bad can easily become good. This is true for the opposition between light and dark as well. Light can give the impression of being dark, and dark can also give the impression of being light.

Word Count: 486 words (without quotes)